

**PROSPECTS FOR A
CONVENTIONAL ARMS
REDUCTION TREATY AND
CONFIDENCE-BUILDING
MEASURES IN NORTHEAST ASIA**

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FOREWORD

We are pleased to publish this thirtieth-fourth volume in the *Occasional Paper* series of the US Air Force Institute for National Security Studies (INSS). In addition to supporting research toward immediately applying the results to contemporary policy issues, INSS seeks to encourage bright young researchers to think outside of the inbox and project new ideas into the future. This is just such an effort. In this paper, Bonnie Jenkins looks at creating an infrastructure within which to address Northeast Asian security issues and against which to begin the process of regional arms control. Of significance, the paper addresses some of the barriers to be encountered in attempting to superimpose structures and norms developed for Europe upon this very different region of the world. This is instructive for similar efforts in other regions as well. Also significant is the paper's emphasis more on the process of arms control than on any one particular product, particularly while regional mechanisms and trust are still being built. This paper is also timely, as the summitry process begins between the Koreas, and as it draws in the other regional actors at least at the margins. It is a paper that presents both ideas and ideals worth considering.

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JAMES M. SMITH
Director

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Background and Initial Ideas

The first of two goals undertaken in the research for this paper is to explore the possibility of establishing in the Northeast Asian region a conventional arms control treaty negotiation leading to an agreement similar to the Conventional Forces in Europe Treaty (CFE). It is presumed a reduction in conventional forces will promote stability in the region similar to what has occurred in Europe. The second goal undertaken in this research is to determine the prospects for establishing a Northeast Asian Security Forum similar to the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE). This body would promote transparency and confidence in Northeast Asia similar to what the OSCE has been able to achieve in Europe.

The process by which these proposals would take place would be two fold. The arms control path would begin between North and South Korea. Only after the two Koreas have negotiated such an agreement would it be extended to other states in the region. The reason for this process is that it is important to first reduce military tensions on the Korean Peninsula. The potential for conventional and sudden conflict in the region exists predominantly on the Peninsula. The two Koreas have already acknowledged the need for a reduction in conventional weapons and have established the basis for this type of agreement in their 1992 Agreement on Reconciliation, Nonaggression and Exchanges and Cooperation Between the South and the North. A second process, a Northeast Asian Security Forum, could be established immediately and would include all states of the Northeast Asian region. This forum would focus on establishing confidence and security-building measures dedicated to military transparency.

Results of Research

My research has determined that there exists a great deal of trepidation to the prospect of establishing a Northeast Asian Security Forum that would discuss confidence-building measures. There is also reluctance to the prospect of a conventional arms control treaty, either on the Peninsula or in the region. The vast majority of individuals I spoke with in Washington, Tokyo, Seoul, and experts at research centers in Hawaii shared this feeling.

There were a number of reasons given for this reluctance. Those who did agree to the necessity of a regional forum highlighted the importance of keeping bilateral relations paramount, while the multilateral forum (to be established sometime in the “indefinite future”) would be complementary to existing bilateral relationships. Some wanted to let the Four Party Talks play out before trying to establish new forums. Some wanted to see if the Association of South Asian Nations (ASEAN) could serve as the site for a new Northeast Asian Forum and were reluctant to establish a separate forum (which I prefer). Some were not comfortable with the prospect of reducing arms since there was not enough trust in the region that other states (particularly North Korea) would similarly reduce their arms or be willing to be adequately verified through on-site inspections. Others pointed out the differences that exist in Europe and Asia, and doubted whether the CFE Treaty and the OSCE could serve as an adequate example. If there were to be a conventional treaty and a regional forum in Northeast Asia, they would have to reflect the particular peculiarities of the region.

However, underneath the objections to a conventional forces treaty and a security forum in the region, I felt there lay the general feeling that most would support such a forum if the regional situation was conducive to such proposals (for example, if there existed more trust and confidence among the states). They did recognize the positive

results a security forum, and reduction in arms, could have for the Peninsula and the region. Therefore, a certain degree of trust must exist *prior* to these states working to reduce regional tension.¹

¹ It is important to note that everyone does not share this feeling. South Korean, Japan and Russian officials have all in the past expressed interest in a Six Party Talk (which would include these three states and the U.S., China and North Korea).